DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 279 455 RC 016 127

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TITLE Native American Studies: A Personal Overview.
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT Wicazo Sa Review; v2 n2 p9-16 Fall 1986

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *American Indian Education; *American Indian Studies; Community Services; Curriculum; Educational Cooperation; Higher Education; *Intellectual Disciplines; *Professional Associations; Program Content; *Program Improvement; Relevance (Education); Research Design; Standards; *Student Personnel Services

ABSTRACT

Native American Studies programs, however small, are the Native community's academic foothold in higher education. To maintain and expand this foothold of approximately 105 programs on university and college campuses throughout the United States, Native American Studies must continue to develop its professional capacity to act as an "independent prosecutor-advocate" in higher education on behalf of Native people. To do this, Native American Studies must achieve the quality and breadth of responsibilities required of other disciplines: the teaching of a well-organized and defined curriculum; the development of a sustained and creative research mission; and programs of service that meet the needs of the Native community, the public, and the profession. Professional standards need to be adopted that articulate the discipline's dual, and often conflicting, responsibilities to both Native and academic communities. In the United States, the lack of a nationally recognized professional association continues to inhibit coordination and cooperation between existing Native American Studies programs and--even more important--it has denied Native American Studies an international voice with which to affect events involving Native people and communities throughout the world. (JHZ)

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Native American Studies: A Personal Overview

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C. Patrick Morris

According to a recent national survey there are approximately 105 Native American Studies (NAS) programs on various university and college campuses throughout the United States (see "Issues for the Future of American Indian Studies" by Charlotte Heth and Susan Guyette, 1985, UCLA). Many of these programs have academic programs which include teaching, service, and research components designed to meet the undergraduate and graduate educational needs and interests of Native and non-Native students.[1] However, most NAS programs remain comparatively small, with program emphasis directed toward student service activities related to Native student recruitment and retention.

After two decades, Native American Studies have not yet achieved a clear academic position.

The emergence of Native American/Native or Indian studies began in the late 1960's in response to political initiatives from Indian students, community leaders and, in particular, Indian "activists" (AIM, NIYC, and others) who created a national political climate that compelled a substantive response from the nation's colleges and universities. Although more than two decades have passed since its inception, NAS has not, as yet, achieved a clear academic personality in higher education, among the general public or even in many Native communities.

In this paper I want to share my personal and professional ideas about Native American Studies and, in the process, give a current assessment of the profession and its potential as an academic discipline.

Problem of Definition

Because of its relative newness, a question frequently asked NAS faculty is: "What is Native American Studies and what does it offer that cannot be better or equally serviced by the existing social sciences and humanities disciplines?" By way of an answer, let me begin by stating what it is not. NAS is not anthropology, history, comparative sociology, or political science, or any other existing discipline, although it certainly has made use of the

1. I have used the term "Native" throughout, except where appropriate, to avoid confusion or misunderstanding between Indians, Inuits, and other native indigenous people in other countries and even other continents. The term "Native" includes, rather than excludes, many of the people and cultures that can legitimately make an intellectual and moral claim on the efforts of "Native Studies." Native American Studies, or NAS, has been used to refer to "Native/Indian Studies" programs in the United States.

methodologies and content of these better known disciplines (cf. Thornton 1981:6–7). Although "ethnically" focused, NAS is more comprehensively defined by the special relationship it promotes between Native people and higher education. While other disciplines may "study" and teach about Native people, these efforts are only part of a larger academic mission, encompassing content, and theoretical concerns that transcend those of Native people. In contrast, NAS is more than an academic chronicler of Native cultures, it is also actively involved in their preservation and development. To accomplish this, NAS continues to be intellectually broad and integrative, utilizing all academic disciplines and methodologies to search, identify and address the critical issues relevant to the Native community. It is this definitive commitment to the Native community and people, rather than to academics alone, that distinguishes NAS from other academic disciplines.

NAS should be actively involved in the preservation and and development of Native cultures.

Curriculum Development: On and Off Campus

The development of NAS curriculum has been shaped as much by practical necessity as by professional ideals. Still viewed as a peripheral academic area, NAS continues to receive limited institutional support and thus has been limited in its curriculum development. Despite this imposed isolation from the academic core, of the 105 NAS programs listed in the UCLA survey, 85 programs provide academic classes, with Native literature, history, religions, and art courses being the most numerous and popular (Heth and Guyette 1985). Beyond these "culture" classes, there is a growing number of NAS programs which now include courses on federal and tribal government relations and law, Indian education and one or more courses on economic and environmental/resource issues. Beyond these four core areas: culture, politics and law, education, and economics/environment the curriculum and services of NAS programs diverge significantly, apparently reflecting local needs and interests, financial resources and efforts to tie NAS curriculum to other interdisciplinary programs.

During the last few years some NAS programs faced with limited, even decreasing, institutional support have opted for the development of "interdepartmental" programs modelled after other "area" or "ethnic" studies programs, such as "Black" or "Asian" studies. Most of these NAS programs consist of a director/coordinator plus one or two full-time faculty and an academic or student counselor, with the majority of the curriculum subcontracted out to other departments (cf. Heth and Guyette 1985). Besides the obvious savings these arrangements provide to colleges and universities, NAS supporters of the interdepartmental model also believe that NAS faculty and curriculum receive greater academic credibility through their association with the recognized academic disciplines. Tenure, promotion and other career considerations are also more regularized under such a scheme.

Decreasing financial support has forced many NAS programs to become "interdepartmental" ventures.

Critics of these interdepartmental programs point out that the benefits of such an arrangement are more than offset by the institution's failure to make an identifiable commitment to the professional development of NAS as a recognized academic discipline (cf. Churchill 1981: 25). Presumably,

academic departments and disciplines exist because they provide intellectual continuity and promote collaborative development of an identified or defined area of study. Building NAS programs through split faculty appointments divides faculty time and loyalties between parent (career) departments and NAS, limiting the focus and visibility of NAS. Despite some concerns over the recent increase in interdepartmental programs, the realities of budget constraints suggests that such programs will continue into the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, my personal and professional opinion is that such dispersed programs should be viewed by NAS as only a transitional step toward the field's eventual maturation as a recognized academic discipline.

Research: the Cost of Credibility

Professional research in NAS continues to be underdeveloped. Most of the published research on NAS related topics is done by scholars from other disciplines, such as anthropology or history. In fact, NAS directed and funded research has been so limited that it is, as yet, unclear what special vision or perspective NAS has to offer as a discipline. Lack of professionally guided research remains the single most challenging issue facing NAS. The discipline seems to be locked in a "Catch 22" situation, where monies for research are not forthcoming because the discipline lacks a recognized and accepted academic mission, yet the discipline cannot develop an academic mission without research money. Outside the colleges and universities, foundations, federal agencies, and academic research centers continue to demonstrate a reluctance to recognize NAS as a discipline capable of significant research. Adding to the problem is the fact that most research proposals from NAS faculty or programs are reviewed by readers outside the profession, usually anthropologists, historians, sociologists, etc, leaving NAS faculty without peer review, and presumably at a decided disadvantage in the intensive battle for the increasingly scarce public and private research funds. If NAS is to survive, then public and private funding sources will have to invest in the academic promise of NAS. In order to encourage such an investment NAS needs to develop professional research goals, something still undone.

"The lack of professionally guided research remains the single most challenging issue facing NAS."

NAS faculty seem to have a similar disadvantage when applying for fellowships. A few years ago I was told by a Fulbright program officer that I could not apply to Norway, even though I had two invitations from Norwegian Universities, "since they only have openings in American Studies and what does that have to do with Native American Studies?" Asked to repeat this unusual statement, the officer immediately recanted.

Unfortunately, many, if not most, NAS programs continue to struggle in hostile academic environments which see them as a threat to enrollments and, therefore, to budgets of the traditional academic disciplines. Lack of academic recognition continues to be the single greatest obstacle to research in NAS. However, some efforts have been made within the profession to improve the research credibility of NAS.

"Lack of academic recognition continues to be the single greatest obstacle to research in NAS."

In September of 1980, sixteen NAS directors from around the nation met in Albuquerque, New Mexico, to explore the possibility of forming a

Native American Studies Association (Dunbar Ortiz 1980). This "Round Table Discussion," as it was called, concluded that the formation of a professional association was not only desirable but essential if NAS was to address successfully issues related to academic credibility, standardization of curriculum, faculty development, and professional research. However, despite consensus among the NAS directors, the meeting did not lead to the establishment of a national professional association for NAS, primarily because it was felt that NAS should avoid emulating other academic associations. As an alternative, a series of annual conferences sponsored by the NAS programs at UCLA, and more recently by Oklahoma State University, have been held to provide a forum for the presentation of NAS research, and to promote further discussions about a NAS professional association. However, to date, no nationally recognized NAS association exists.

In addition to the problems associated with academic research, there remain the even more immediate research needs of the off-campus Native community: Indian reservations, urban Indian communities, and Native Alaskan corporations and unincorporated Native groups.

Today most Native communities face overwhelming technological and scientific developments, many of which will change permanently the human scale of Native life. In order for Native communities to assert successfully a tribal presence in these developments, thousands of Native scientists, economists, lawyers, and scholars from all academic disciplines will be needed to assert those interests. Unfortunately, few colleges and universities have made use of their NAS programs to enhance Native access to these areas of knowledge. But this is changing.

"Think tanks" and Tribe/University consortiums offer a means to provide Native students with long-term research and educational development.

Within the last decade several NAS programs have initiated or acted as facilitators in the development of major research and training programs in the sciences, technologies, and businesses to address the self defined needs of Native communities. The example which I am most familiar with is the American Indian Research Opportunities program at Montana State University (AIRO). This is a Tribe/University cooperative research consortium that links the University's biomedical faculty and laboratories with those of the seven tribally controlled community colleges in the state. The purpose of the consortium is to provide Native students and tribal college faculty with opportunities to develop long-term research and educational programs that address Native community needs, such as environmental and man caused health problems. The consortium also explores opening new research areas for both faculty and students, such as genetic engineering (see AIRO Program Announcement 1986). The key to the success of such ventures is meaningful Native involvement in the research governance and design of such programs. The Tribe/University consortium arrangement is only one possibility. Another possibility is the development of research-oriented, regional "think tanks" staffed and controlled by Native people which could collect, disseminate, and selectively implement research programs sought by Native communities in their areas. The role of NAS programs would be to act as "Academic-to-Community" facilitators to coordinate university and college resources with such community based research efforts. NAS involvement in such projects could only strengthen and broaden its Native advocacy role in higher education especially in promoting Native governance

in the implementation of such programs.

In addition to the linking of on-campus academic resources to those of the Native community, the 21 Tribal colleges nationwide are themselves unique opportunities for NAS faculty to work directly with the Native community.

The Tribal college has become the most remarkable development in Indian education in the last half century.

The Tribal college movement began with the founding of the Navajo Community College in 1968 and has grown into the most remarkable development in Indian education during the last half century. Without leaving their home reservations, Indian students are now graduating with degrees in forestry, education, biology, pre-engineering, social and human services, and learning job skills in a wide variety of vocational programs—and NAS.

Presently, the major funding source for the tribal colleges is Public Law PL-95-471, the Tribally Controlled Community College Act of 1978 (Dupris 1980:41). While PL 95-471 authorizes 4,000 per full time equivalent (FTE), the actual appropriations have barely exceeded 2,300 per FTE, more than 1,000 below that budgeted for similar public two year colleges (Comtec: Newsletter of Indian Education Information Service, June 1986: 3-4). Currently, the Department of the Interior is attempting to use spurious rules and regulations to decrease Tribal college funding even further.

Tribal colleges seek financial independence with a national endowment campaign.

To survive in spite of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the Tribal colleges must constantly seek outside funds. Within the last two years, the coordinating association of the Tribal colleges, the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC),has developed a national endowment support campaign with the hope that each college eventually will become financially independent. NAS faculty can provide assistance to these efforts by communicating the needs of the Tribal colleges to the general public and by responding to requests for professional assistance from these organizations. NAS faculty can also learn a lot from their colleagues teaching in the Tribal college system. It is an ideal situation for collaborative research.

Beyond the issues facing NAS nationally, there remain those that continue to emerge internationally.

An International Role for NAS: Human Rights for Native People

Native Studies must seek access to national educational programs on their own cultural terms.

Although NAS began in the United States, "Native Studies" has now become an international educational movement involving a number of foreign countries including: Canada, Norway, Australia, and New Zealand. Like their counterparts in the United States, these Native Studies programs have emerged in response to the growing political activism of Native/Indigenous people worldwide. Native Studies has now become an international academic discipline. If one were to search for a common theme promoting Native Studies internationally, it would be the conviction that the discipline is one way for Native people to access national educational systems on their own cultural terms. In Canada, NAS programs have existed for years at Brandon, Trent, and the University of Lethbridge. This last year the University of Alberta at Edmonton started its own NAS program. In all Canada has nine degree granting NAS programs and 39 service programs nation-wide. At present, no reserve based Canadian tribal colleges

exist. However, at the University of Regina in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, the Native people of the Province have established, in conjunction with the University of Regina, the "Indian Federated College" which provides a four year curriculum in a wide range of academic and professional programs directed toward the special educational needs of Canada's Native people. Among major Canadian universities, the University of British Columbia and Quebec remain the glaring exceptions to what has become a national, and now international, education initiative.

To coordinate national support for these Native Studies programs, a number of Canadian NAS faculty gathered in Lethbridge, Alberta, in May of 1985 and organized the Canadian Native Studies Association, with Blair Stonechild of the Indian Federated College elected as the first President. This year the Canadian Native Studies Association presented themselves to the Canadian Learned Societies as a nationally recognized academic discipline.

Native or Indigenous People programs outside the western hemisphere include the Saami Institute in Kautekaino, Norway, and emergent Native Studies programs in Australia and New Zealand. Unfortunately, a complete listing of NAS or Native Studies programs worldwide is not available, thus inhibiting the international coordination of teaching, research, and service interests of Native Studies faculty. The need for international cooperation and coordination is most evident in the area of human rights. And the need is immediate and critical.

Recent events in Central and South America, and, in fact, wherever Native people live, make evident that our own national history and Native policies have their counterpart in other countries. "Termination," "self-determination," "assimilation," "reserves," missionaries, treaties, state expropriation of Tribal lands and natural resources, etc., are not U.S. themes alone, but have guided the formation and implementation of national policies toward Native people throughout the world.

International cooperation is needed for indigenous tribal peoples to gain legal and political recognition and protection.

Native people continue to be caught in an uneven struggle with intransigent, even violent, national governments who see "Native rights" as a threat to national control over valuable natural resources still claimed by Native people. Dominated by nation-states, indigenous tribal people lack effective international legal and political recognition and protection, even the basic human right to the protection of person and property. As a profession, NAS in the United States has yet to address the many unresolved international human rights of native people. To date, there is no coordinated link between NAS teaching, research, and service priorities and the political, social, and economic aspirations of Native people world-wide. Profession-wide teaching, research, and service objectives should be established to bring before the world the legitimate concerns of Native people. Support for international Native directed organizations, such as the World Council of Indigenous People, and International Human Rights groups such as The International Workgroup for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), Copenhagen, and Survival International, Cultural Survival, and the United Nations Sub-Committee on Racism and Discrimination, need to become a high priority for NAS.

One effort to increase the awareness of Native people in the U.S. and Canada about the critical and complex issues facing Native people in other

countries are the international exchange programs sponsored by the Center for Native American Studies at Montana State University and the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College at Regina. Indian students, teachers, and community leaders have visited Norway, France, Italy, Chile, and China to see firsthand the effects of various national policies on Native/Indigenous people. The exchanges have also motivated some Native leaders to internationalize their views on political and economic development and to explore opportunities for international trade, tourism, and cooperative research and teaching between NAS programs and foreign colleges and universities. These international programs have succeeded in broadening the academic role of Native Studies far beyond that envisioned by most college and university administrations.

Conclusions

NAS programs, however small, are the Native community's academic foothold in higher education. To maintain and expand this foothold, NAS must continue to develop its professional capacity to act as an "independent prosecutor-advocate" in higher education on behalf of Native people. To do this, NAS must achieve the quality and breadth of responsibilities required of other disciplines: the teaching of a well-organized and defined curriculum; the development of a sustained and creative research mission; and programs of service that meet the needs of the Native community, the public, and the profession. Professional standards need to be adopted that articulate the discipline's dual, and often conflicting, responsibilities to both the Native and academic communities. In the United States, the lack of a nationally recognized professional association continues to inhibit coordination and cooperation between existing NAS programs—and even more important—it has denied NAS an international voice with which to affect events involving Native people and communities throughout the world.

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